

Rensselaer Russell House
520 West Third Street
Waterloo
Black Hawk County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-64

HABS
IDWA,
7-WATLO,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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RENSSELAER RUSSELL HOUSE

HABS No. IA-64

Location: 520 West Third Street, Waterloo, Black Hawk County, Iowa.

The house faces southeast

Present owner: People's Mutual Savings and Loan Association, West Third Street and Washington Street, Waterloo, Iowa

Present use: House museum operated by the Association for the Preservation of Rensselaer Russell House

Significance: The Rensselaer Russell House is a fine example of Italian Villa style architecture, is one of the oldest houses still standing in Black Hawk County, and when first built was a showplace in Waterloo, only recently a frontier settlement.

PART 1. HISTORY

Dates of construction: Construction began in mid-1862 and continued through the summer and possibly the fall of 1863. The evidence for this dating is as follows.

Deed Record Lot E, pp. 524-536, at Black Hawk County Courthouse, Waterloo, records the purchases by Caroline M. Russell of Lots 4, 5, 8, and 9 in Block 28, and of Lot 1 in Block 28 on 25 and 29, May 1, 1862, for a price of \$150.00 per lot. At this price the lots could not have had buildings erected upon them.

Renesselaer Russell's "Memorandum of Building and Labor" records his payments for materials and labor for erection of the house. Only

some of the entries include dates, but enough information is given for accurate dating. The purchase of the land is the first entry, and the date of 1862 for this is known from public records. The next entries on page 1 are undated, but the second half of the entries for page 2 are dated with day and month - several entries for November, one for October, and one for December. Page 3 begins with the notation of 1863 written at the top of the page and contains entries from March through June 15. Page 4 has entries from July 1 to November 30, which may be also assumed to be 1863. Therefore, it would seem that construction began in the middle of 1862. Construction may have continued through the summer and possibly the fall of 1863, since the last bills are dated November 30.

In 1947 renovation and remodeling work was done, including repairs to the parlor ceiling and to a portion of the rear of the house, and a sleeping porch was placed at the rear of the house. The one mantelpiece in the house, originally in the sitting room, was moved into the parlor. The iron stairway to the cupola was removed, and the hallway space formerly occupied by this stairway was used to enlarge the small bedroom adjacent to it. In 1948 the small, low windows of the second-floor bedroom to the right of the hallway were heightened, cutting through the deep frieze below the eaves (4).

From 1969 to 1972 restoration work has been done under the Association for the Preservation of Rensselaer Russell House bringing the house to its present condition (4; 8).

Architect or designer: Unknown. It is not possible to determine from Russell's ledger if a fee was paid to anyone for designing the house (3; 5).

Original and subsequent owners:

Deed 25 May 1852, filed for record 26 May 1862 in Black Hawk County, Iowa,
Deed Record Lots E, p. 524.

Noah H. Setts and Herma C. Setts, his wife; Nathan Org and Meriel Org,
his wife; Isaac N. Beem and Marj T. Beem, his wife; of Marshall County,
Illinois

to

Caroline M. Russell of Black Hawk County, Iowa
For \$600. Lots Numbers 4, 5, 8, 9 in Block No. 28 in the Village of
Waterloo West of Cedar River (2).

Deed 29 May 1862, filed for record 30 May 1862 in Black Hawk County, Iowa,
Deed Records Lots E, p. 536.

Jonathan Reitzel of Stephenson County, Illinois

to

Caroline M. Russell of Black Hawk County, Iowa
For \$150. Lot No. 1, Block No. 28 in the Village of Waterloo West of
Cedar River (2).

The house subsequently has been owned by the following descendants
of Rensselaer and Caroline Russell:

- Lillian Russell Lamson (daughter) and her husband
Clyde Orrin Lamson (4),
- Russell O. Lamson (son of Lillian and Clyde Lamson) and his
wife Pauline (4),
- Peoples Mutual Savings and Loan Association of Waterloo (8).

Contractors and suppliers: Rensselaer Russell hired the various tradesmen who built the house, purchased materials, and supervised and coordinated the work. Inspection of his record of expenses leads to this conclusion. The following is a transcription of it (5): Rensselaer Russell, "Memorandum of Building and Labor."

Page 1

Lots No For a Residence. Waterloo

1 5 4 8 & 9 Block 28 Bought

for \$150.00 Each 750.00

Comm to Geo Miller 20.00

Paid Back Taxes on Lots 29.50

" Fencing to Farwell 40.00

" Anchors at Foundry 2.50

" Paid M. H. Moore on Lumber 157.84

" For Lumber at Chicago 114.78

" Goodhue & Co. Lumber at Dubuque 178.90

" Freight on Lumber Chicago 66.25

" Freight on Lumber, Dubuque 35.10

" Bill of Lumber of H & Miller 249.79

" For Castings 113.00

" Freight on Castings 41.90

" Cut Stone &c 28.95

" Strayer for Brick
84866 B 4.75 403.11

" Glover & Rich for stone 68.97

" Yates for Laying Brick 89.50

" " " Board 18.00

" Seeman for Plastering 114.93

" Reed for Laying Brick 25.50

" John M. Manus 7.21

" " Brother 2.25

" McF Amt Car^d For^d 2578.08

[Note: The total is in error
by +20.10]

Page 2

Amt Brot Forward	2578.08
Fr Cash Paid Harry Cadwell for work	28.95
" Simon Gratton	144.00
" G. W. Rodafer for carpenter W ^k	27.76
" Seeley, D C. Stone work	2.00
" W ^m Maticks for Hailing Brick	12.55
" N. Ordway "	3.41
" C. Cook "	9.00
" Miller	6.50
Nov. 22 Andrews for Carpenter Work	30.00
Dec. 10 Andrews " "	44.50
Nov. 11 Little	15.00
" Clint Cook Shingling	3.00
" Mr. Raddall "	4.50
" " Mickell "	12.50
" " Korson "	1.50
" " Burke	57.79
Nov. 22 " Worcester for Painting	2.25
Oct. 30 Paid McAntee for Lime	84.20
" " " Cedar Falls for Lime	7.45
McFarland for Laying Stone	63.75
Hitt Robinson & Co for Hair	4.21
Paid for Pump in Well	7.00
" - Cistern Pump - 5 ⁰⁰ 12 Pipe	17.00
	\$ 3166.90

Page 3

1863 Amt Brot For ^d	\$3166.90
March 30 Paid C A Farwells Lumber Bill	19.92
" 31 D B Stanton Bill for Nails &c	133.05
April 31 To Brick for Chimney	10.00
Farwell for Lumber - Shinge	44.00
May 1 Fr Paid Seeman	10.00
May 11 Mr Yates	14.75
" " W W Fossy Bill for Paints &c	25.50
" " Paid M. H. Moore for Balance on Lumber	62.34
" 15 Paid for Varnish	6.00
" 19 Paid Farwell for Lumber	9.00
" 28 Paid for Varnish at Cedar Fall	26.78
June 13 Paid Rodafer for Blinds	38.00
15 " Goodhue for Lumber	22.22
" Paid Dubuque Lumber Bill	20.00
" Freight on Shingles	75.00
" Mr. Corson	1.50
" Emmett Sill	7.50
" Geo. Colton	1.25
" Wisconsin Lumber	23.00
" Capt. Pierce Switzer	3.12
" J. F. Miller	1.50
Andrews	37.00
Peater Burke	27.67
	\$ 3786.00

Page 4

	Amt Brot Forward	\$3786.00
	Paid Hopkins for Carpenter Work	[blank]
	Discount on Waggon used	10.00
	" Harnesses	6.50
	Paid for Blacksmithing	15.68
	Paid Thomas Fay	83.00
	" Thomas Ward	33.65
	" Pat Murray	49.00
	" Frank Burke	38.50
	" E. Reynolds	37.86
	" Worcester for Painting	114.71
July 1	" Fossey for Paint	16.00
31	Paid for saving Bracket	18.00
Aug 1	Paid W W Fossy for Paints	22.40
8	" Rodafer	10.00
	" Hosford and Miller for Lumb	32.09
13	Paid Goodhue & Co	13.75
22	" P. T. Hopkins	516.63
"	" Goodhue &	20.32
Oct. 14	Goodhue for Lumb	15.64
Nov. 18	Capitals 7H	49.00
28	Lumber Bill of Farwell	26.65
30	Champlin for Turning	8.40
	D. B. Stanton	145.05

[Note: written in pencil in the same place as the 8.40 of the second-to-last entry: 4915.08. This amount would be a subtotal in error by the same +20.10 error found on the first page of this ledger.]

Page 5

[Note: This total is written in pencil; ink is
used elsewhere. The correct total of pages 1-4
is \$5048.73. P. 5 is in error +830.10]

\$5878.83

The Russell and Lamson families: Rensselaer Russell was born in Otsego County, New York, in 1828. John Russell, his father, was a carpenter and had been born in England. The son attended rural schools in the county, then the Hartwick Seminary. In 1853 he married Caroline Richards. After working as a dry-goods clerk in New York City, he returned to Otsego County in 1856 and spent a year on his father-in-law's farm. In 1857 the couple and their infant daughter Genevieve traveled west by railroad to Dubuque and then by wagon to Waterloo, Iowa.

Russell was a businessman involved in banking, real estate, and in wholesale and retail grocery sales. In 1860 he had the Russell building built, the top floor of which was known as Russell Hall and was used for church, lodge, and other meetings. Russell was a community-spirited citizen. In 1871 he gave the city the city block opposite his house, now called Washington Square. He was a vestryman at Saint Mark's Waterloo until his death on 11 November 1896.

The first daughter, Genevieve, drowned in 1862. Lillian, born in 1869, grew up to be a companion to her father after her mother's death in 1887. Lillian married Clyde Olwin Lamson in 1897, the year after her father's death. Living in the house, the Lamsons had two children, Russell O. and Maxine R. (6, pp. 410, 411). Lillian Russell, having received the usual ladies' education given to women of her economic circumstances at the time, found after marriage that she had talent in financial management. She attended and graduated from the Waterloo Gates Business College and joined with her husband in business and financial affairs. The construction of the Russell-Lamson Building was the result of their joint efforts. Lillian survived her husband, dying in 1946 (4).

Russell O. Lamson and his wife then had renovation and repairs done to the house. They lived there until 1963 and were the last residents (8).

Early Development of Waterloo:

- 1847 First settler in what was to become Waterloo (7, p. 379).
- 1850 Black Hawk County population was 135 (9, p. 943).
- 1853 The town was named (7, p. 379). A 16 ft x 24 ft log cabin was built, also used as a boarding house (7, p. 279). A second log cabin was built, also used as a boarding house (7, p. 379). The first store was opened, also in a log cabin (7, p. 382).
- 1854 There were 17 buildings in the town (7, p. 382). The first mill, a sawmill, began operation. It was a frame building (7, p. 382). The first bank opened (7, p. 383).
- 1855- A second hotel was built; it was a small frame building. The
1856 second log-cabin boarding house, built in 1853, had been turned into the first hotel (7, pp. 379, 381). A second bank and the first flour mill were built (7, p. 382, 383).
- 1860 The population of the town was 1205 (10, p. 140).
- 1861 The first train on the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad arrived in town (7, p. 386).
- 1866 The first woolen mill was built (7, p. 386).
- 1870 The population of the town had reached 4337 (11, p. 132). The town was connected with the Burlington, Cedar Rapids, and Minnesota Railroad (7, p. 386).

PART 2.

Condition of the Fabric: Good.

Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: the building is irregular in shape, but could be contained within a rectangle approximately 50 ft x 53 ft (1).
2. Number of stories: two, plus a cellar and a central cupola.
3. Layout shape: rectangular plan containing a high two-story block, a lower two-story block to the right (as one faces the front of the house), and two one-story wings, one at the rear center and one at the rear right.
4. Foundation: stone.
5. Wall construction, finish, color: red brick.
6. Structural system: brick bearing walls at exterior and at bearing partitions. Five iron rods terminating in metal star-shaped forms are visible at the level of the second floor (3).
7. Porches: at right side of the front and turning the right corner of the front. This porch has six, wooden Corinthian columns. The front door is a small porch with two similar columns and matching pilasters, also of wood. eaves of both porches are trimmed by a wrought-iron cresting painted black.
8. Chimneys: red brick.
9. Doorways and doors: the entrance door is a single door with a transom. Door trim is painted white.
10. Windows and shutters: all windows are sash type. Shutters are wooden louvered type and are painted black. The hoods above the windows

are of cast iron and the window sills are wooden. The cupola has twelve arched windows, three on each of its four sides. All sash and trim are painted white.

11. Roof shape: the roofs are hipped and shingled. A very wide frieze with paired brackets and wide overhangs surrounds the house, constituting its most striking decorative feature. This woodwork is also painted white.

Interior:

1. Floor plans: (Right and left are taken as though one were outside the house facing the front door.) One enters at the right side of the largest block of the house, into the end of a reception hall. The stairway is at the opposite end of the hall. At the left is a parlor running the full depth of this part of the house. At the right is a sitting room, behind which and further to the right is the dining room. Behind the dining room is a narrow office. The kitchen lies at the rear and center of the house, behind the largest block, and has its own stairway to the second floor.

On the second floor the master bedroom and a smaller room lie above the parlor, the master bedroom in front. In the rear bedroom there is evidence of part of the ceiling having been plastered over at the place of access to the cupola. The portion of this room beneath the cupola seems to have been a separate space; there is evidence in the present interior surfaces that this rear bedroom was formerly partitioned into two rooms. The part below the cupola would have contained the staircase to the cupola.

To the right of the hall is a low-ceilinged bedroom. A front room above the entrance to the house is now a bathroom. There is no evidence

in Russell's "Memorandum of Building and Labor" for expenses for a bathroom in the house as he built it. Toilet facilities would have been in an outhouse, as was then customary.

2. Stairways: the principal stairway forms a U in plan. Its handrail and newel are of varnished hardwood and its balusters are turned and painted.

3. Flooring: most of the floors are now carpeted, but a varnished hardwood floor is visible in the dining room.

4. Wall and ceiling finishes: plaster, with ceilings painted and walls papered.

5. Special decorative features: in the parlor ceiling there is a large, heavy decorative plaster rosette at the center of the room, and a lighting fixture is suspended there.

6. Mechanical equipment: modern heating, plumbing, and wiring have been added. There was no original central heating.

PART 3. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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